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ABSTRACT

A number of professional qualities might be developed in a program designed to prepare early childhood teachers to function in multiple settings. Solving problems, assessing situations, communicating with a range of people, and being flexible and innovative are such qualities. But one can also view prepararing educators to function in multiple settings in light of the concepts of ownership, collaboration, contingency, and service. No clear link exists between educators' professional qualities in multiple settings and the nature of programs that would encourage development of such qualities. Many questions about preparing preservice teachers remain unanswered. (RH)

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Preparing Early Childhood Practitioners for Work in Multiple Settings

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Preparing Early Childhood Practitioners for Work in Multiple Settings

The concept of multiple settings education presented in this paper focuses on educative functions in settings, such as museums and industry, that are not traditionally associated with schooling. However, multiple settings in education can also include schooling in its more formal sense. This broader focus is clearly outlined in professional documents and in early childhood teacher education program materials. A specific instance of the commitment to education in multiple settings is found in the 1982 NAEYC policy statement, Early Childhood Teacher Education Guidelines in which early childhood settings are defined as "services for children from birth through eight in part-day and full-day group programs in centers, homes, and institutions; kindergartens and primary shools; and recreational programs."1

The purpose of this paper is to explicate the qualities of a professional person that might be developed in an early childhood teacher education program that prepares teachers to provide services for children in a range of settings. Within this context, a professional is defined as an active inquirer into her practice, a decision maker, an individual who functions in a social context, and a continuous learner.2 These qualities of a professional are deemed pertinent to functioning productively in a range of early childhood educational settings for the following reasons: educators in

multiple settings interact with a range of persons; clients and staff as well as the roles each assumes change frequently; quick but accurate assessments of a sitution in flux often need to be made; on-the-spot, unanticipated decisons are frequently the rule rather than the exception; and adjustments in common knowledge applicable across settings must be made. In essence, solving problems, assessing situations, communicating with a range of people, and being flexible and innovative are personal qualities requisite to working effectively in multiple settings that educate.

Although considerable overlap exists among the four characteristics of a professional presented, each is discussed separately with practical examples drawn from guidelines developed for studying education in nonschool settings.3 The examples are derived from a study of a hospital and a museum for children, but experience in other contexts suggests that the examples often apply across settings.

Qualities of a Professional

Active Inquirer Into Practice

In The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action , Schon4 proposes that the professional engages in problem setting as well as in problem solving and in so doing uses knowledge generated in the setting as well as that brought to the setting. That is, the professional person moves beyond applying knowledge learned prior to entering the setting to creating knowledge while interacting with the elements of the context. For example, even though an educator in a hospital

has read about that setting prior to entering it, functioning productively in it will require generating on-the-spot knowledge that facilitates identifying problems and modes of solving them. Consider the situation in which an educator is asked to function in a space primarily assigned to health care. What constitutes the range of alternatives for providing service in this space? How might the space or educational plan be revised? Who are the significant others who might be effected by the proposed revisions? Attempts to answer these questions reveal that problems do not always present themselves in neat packages nor do anticipated problems always emerge.

The fluidity, ambiguity, and complexities of educational settings call for reflective practitioners who can move beyond technical knowledge to what Paul terms dialectical reasoning or "...reasoning called for whenever we are confronted by issues that cross categories or disciplinary lines, by issues for which different possible points of view can plausibly be developed."5 The museum educator who often works with an anthropologist, socioliogist, and other specialists in designing appropriate educatonal acivities frequently engages in dialectical reasoning.

Persons who inquire into their practice usually assume an on-going evaluative stance. Determining what transpires in settings requires skills of knowing what to study, selecting and applying modes of inquiry appropriate to identified questions, and applying what is learned in the process. Teaching in a non-school setting often requires skill in

utilizing a range of evaluative modes. For example, educators in hospitals may be asked to determine the success of services after patient discharge as well as during hospitalization. In addition, educators are often requested to assess the educational impact of activities that are not within the immediate scope of the education programs. In the latter, museum educators can be requested to devise evaluative procedures for a program or display outside their defined reponsibilities.

Decision Maker

To single out decision maker as a characteristic of a professional is difficult at best since the other characteristics also involve decision making. But not to highlight this process would be misleading--giving the false impression that because a process gives direction to all of life, it requires no special study. The current research literature on teaching is replete with studies of teacher decision making behavior.6

In a recent appeal to make the right changes in preservice teacher education, Berliner points out that nontrivial complex decisions take place at the rate of "10 per hour" in environments where teachers have about "1500 interactions per day with different children on different issues..."7 When the nature of these myriad instructional decisions is studied within the complex contexts in which they occur, it becomes clear that a logical, linear approach to the intricacies of teaching may not be appropriate at all but if employed should

be tempered with reasoned judgment. Moving beyond the technical and scientific knowledge to reasoned judgment doesn't imply a non-use of the technical. Rather, as Bok8 proposes, the techical can be used to check judgments. So too, reasoned judgment does not preclude on-the-spot decisions. For it is on-the-spot decision making that provides the raw material for reflecting in practice. The unanticipated adult in a wheel chair or the child with a sight impairment can challenge a museum educator to make quick decisons -- decisions that build on a range of thinking and problem solving skills.

A Sensitive Communicator

The social characteristic of education is a given, but the number and range of interactions between and among groups that characterize educational efforts in multiple settings justify special attention. In making decisons about education in multiple settings, educators ask: What is the nature of and relationships among the participating groups? What characterizes the interactions that the context facilitates and supports? At a more specific level, multiple settings educators often have to communicate with persons whose attention may be difficult to obtain and maintain. In addition educators communicate with professionals in other disciplines, who as in the case of medical personnel, often determine the content of educational activities.

The social context can also include a power base that to a large degree resides in the users and supporters of an institution. In order to communicate effectively with

different power bases and with other institutions, the professional needs a working knowledge of the broader issues pertinent to the home institution as well as collaborating institutions. Communicating clearly with a range of audiences, listening attentively and creatively, and responding sensitively and with knowledge are skills that facilitate an educator's functioning effectively in the social contexts of multiple educational settings.

A Continuous Learner

Inquiring into practice, making informed decisions, and communicating effectively with a wide range of audiences are qualities of a continuous learner, for implied in the description of these qualities is the view of self as learner. When one perceives self as a person in process--one that sees mistakes or poor beginnings as motivation to try an alternative approach or to view from a different perspective, there is always the prospect of a new lead--another hunch to explore. In this process, one learns not only about the setting but also about self interacting with the setting--the changes, new insights, the old that needs to be recast or cast off or perhaps just put aside temporarily. The self is not totally determined by the setting but both interact in the exploration, testing, refining, and deciding. Freedom from the one right way or the answer syndrome clears the path for the opening-up stance of the continuous learner.

Another Perspective

Direct application of the ideas expressed to this point

would probably result in a teacher education program that focuses on making decisions, solving problems from varied perspectives, communicating sensitively, and viewing self as learner. But one can also view the preparation of multiple settings educators through a related set of lenses consisting of the concepts of ownership, collaboration, contingency, and service.

Understanding the concept of ownership appears to be critical to functioning as a team member in multiple settings. One might ask: Who is perceived as owning which knowledge in a setting where the major purpose is not to educate as in schools, but perhaps to heal? What does the languge of the different profesional groups that provide input to educators suggest about ownership? And how does an educator in the setting negotiate around substantive content?

The ability to collaborate with persons within and across settings is highlighted in multiple settings when persons who don't necessarily perceive themselves as educators either offer or are designated to provide input. In such instances, skill in collaborating across boundaries is a critical process.

The third concept, shared responsibility, encompasses the notion that even within situations where knowledge and process boundaries might be tightly drawn, certain problems require input from more than one source. Under such circumstances, feeling in control in ones's domain has to be tempered with an openness to hearing another's view thereby acknowledging the joint responsibility.

Still another concept that emerged from the examination of the qualities of a professional is contingency--a concept closely related to decision making. Contingency is the notion that at any one point in our lives there exist many possibilities of which we may recognize only a few.9 Knowing this and assuming responsibility for our decisions makes it possible for us to develop an attitude which suggests, "These are the decisions which I make within this context: however, circumstances may change both my choices and the results of my choices."10

Finally, the role of educator in multiple settings can be viewed through the lens of service by asking how one can serve in a co-equal relatonship and spirit admidst real or perceived heirarchies. Volunteers and paid staff serve and are served in different capacities for different reasons with different satisfactions. To understand and accept the capacity and willingness to serve appears to be a key asset of an educator in any setting but particularly one who in many multiple settings relies heavily on volunteers.

A Caveat

If a tentativeness to prescribe was hinted at in the beginning of this paper, it is even more pervasive now that new knowledge for the writer has been generated in the process. Thus the caveat. Yes, the link between professional qualities of educators in multiple settings and the nature of programs that would encourage development of these qualites, assuming they are appropriate, is still missing. And perhaps it is good

that the gap still exists, as there are still many unanswered questions about preparing preservice teachers.11 But, there are some answers, some data. The examples from a hospital and a museum were derived from observations and discussions with educational staff who were successful in their work. These individuals shared with us their views of the complexites of the task and how they dealt with them. But, how much more we might learn if we were to spend time with educators as they reflect in more depth on their practice revealing how they deal with contingency, the thought processes they employ, and how and when they engage in problem setting. Another question: How do they vary their behavior when they negotiate with volunteers or with directors of divisions within their setting? And how do we know what the students we are preparing see as important and why? What experiences, knowledge, feelings re self as professional will enable them to identify and act upon what is important? And even more basic, who determines what is important under which conditions?

We who prepare students to teach know the frustrations of trying to achieve a match between student motivaton, perceived roles of beginning teachers, expectations of the field, and our teacher education curricula. The road ahead is exciting and in many ways uncharted. On second thought, perhaps we who assume responsibility for educating teachers should view ourselves through the lenses described in this paper. This might be a first step or even just a step.

FOOTNOTES

1 National Association for the Educaiton of Young Children, Early Childhood Teacher Education Guidelines (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1982), p. xii.

2 Jessie A. Roderick, "What Characterizes a Professional?" (mimeographed)

3 Jessie Roderick and Richard Hopkins, "Guidelines for Studying Education in Non-School Settings," Journal of Teacher Education, 35: 37-41, January-February 1984.

4 Donald A. Schon, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983).

5 Richard W. Paul, "Critical Thinking: Fundamental to Education for a Free Society," Educational Leadership, 42:4-15, September 1984, p. 13.

6 See the work at the Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University.

7 David Berliner, "Making the Right Changes in Preservice Teacher Education," Phi Delta Kappan, 66: 94-96, October 1984, p. 95.

8 Derek Bok, "Needed: A New Way to Train Doctors," The Harvard Magazine, 32-43 and 70-71, May-June 1984.

9 J.F.T. Bugental, The Search for Authenticity: An Existential-Analytic Approach to Psychotherapy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

10 Louise Berman and Jessie Roderick, Curriculum: Teaching the What, How, and Why of Living (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1977) p. 43.

11 Virginia Koehler, "Research on Preservice Teacher Education." Paper presented at the National Conference on Teacher Education, sponsored by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Austin, Texas, October 3, 1984.